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Museum of Fine Arts Bulletin

Published bi-monthly by the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Massachusetts
Subscription price, 50 cents per year postpaid. Single copies, 10 cents

VOL. XVII

BOSTON, AUGUST, 1919

No. 102



Krishna with the Flute

Early Kangra

Ross-Coomaraswamy Collection

RAJPUT PAINTING*

IV. The Kangra Valley

RAJPUT painting is probably better known by the productions of the Kangra Valley in the Panjab Himalayas than by those of any other district. The Kangra *kalam*[†] is distinguished from the more vigorous and daring color and draughtsmanship of the older Rajasthani and Jammu schools

* See Bulletin No. 96, for August, 1918.

[†] Sanskrit *kalam*, Persian *qalm*, Latin *calamus*, a pen; the same words are used in India to denote writing and drawing, though Indian drawing is not calligraphic. In a secondary sense the word *kalam* denotes "style" or "school," so that we find the terms *Kangra kalam*, *Jaipur kalam*, *Irani kalam*, etc., in use.

by its constant tenderness and refinement. Of this refinement it exhibits both the virtues and the faults; some of the later works are rather obviously in search of the picturesque. In perhaps a majority of examples, however, there is an irresistible sweetness and charm which does not pass over into sentimentality, and the long and elegant brush outlines still recall the older mural tradition. The Kangra *kalam* is not confined to the valley, but extends to neighboring districts, such as Mandi, Sukhet and Patyala, and the more distant Garhwal.

It would be difficult to prove that any of the Kangra paintings go farther back than the middle part of the seventeenth century, when the Kangra rajas became tributaries of the Mughal empire under Shah Jahan. Mughal influences are sometimes recognizable in the painting, and particularly in the architecture, though the painting never loses its ideal and linear character.

Broadly speaking we can distinguish an early Kangra style, probably round about 1700, usually with soft powdery coloring and deeply emotional, from the late more abundant work of the late eighteenth century with brilliant enameled color and a more calculated charm. A very large proportion of the later (eighteenth century) works are in the half-finished state and to be regarded as studies and records of composition. The latest group of the Pahari paintings of the Kangra *kalām* comes from Garhwal, and is attributed to a painter by the name of Mola Ram, who flourished 1760-1833 A. D. Some creditable work has been done at an even later date in out-of-the-way places, and though the school is now practically extinct a very few Pahari painters still practice their art, especially in its application to the decoration of walls.

The themes of Kangra paintings differ from those of other Rajput art chiefly in the absence of pictures illustrating musical modes, and the predominance of Krishna subjects, heroines of rhetoric, romances, and occasional *genre* subjects. Illustrations of Tantrik* mythology are also found, and as elsewhere, themes of Saiva mythology and illustrations for the epics, and also portraits.

VAISHNAVA THEMES

By Vaishnavism we understand the worship of Vishnu (Narayana) as a personal god either directly or in the form of one or other of his avatars or special incarnations, of whom the chief are Rama and Krishna. Special forms of devotional Vaishnavism appear from the eleventh century onwards, and dominate the parallel developments of Hindi and Bengali literature and Rajput painting.

The cult of Rama follows the course of the old classic epic, which had been the subject of illustration by Indian painters from time immemorial; and as we have seen, some idea of these old works may be gathered from the large *Ramayana* pictures of the School of Jammu. A new rendering of the story, however, is given in the great Hindi poem of Tulsi Das, and themes from the story are found amongst the Kangra paintings. The mediæval cult of Krishna, on the other hand, is more concerned with the *enfances*—the lyrical episodes of the Brindaban cycle and the Ras Lila†—than with the

epic hero. The divine child, born at Mathura, to avoid the death designed for him by his wicked uncle, King Kamsa, is taken away to the pastoral village of Brindaban, beside the Jamna, and there brought up amongst the herdsmen and milkmaids as the foster son of the farmer Nand and his wife Yasoda. In Vaishnava homes the child Krishna holds a place analogous to that of the infant Jesus in Latin Christianity. Amongst his childish pranks, he used to steal the butter churned by Yasoda; and the "butter thief" is the subject of many of the smaller bronzes and some of the drawings. As Krishna grows older he drives the cattle to their pasture in the morning, and is called Govinda, the Herdsman. He plays the part of a youthful Heracles and overcomes many monsters; not the least of these was the dragon or hydra Kaliya, who haunted a whirlpool of the Jamna and poisoned the air for miles around. At the "hour of cowdust"—the brief Indian twilight—he brings the cattle back to Brindaban.

Krishna bewilders and beguiles all hearts by the playing of his magic flute; and he is represented with the flute, accompanied by milkmaids and herdsmen, in innumerable pictures (pp. 33, 35). But in the words of a poem inscribed on one of the drawings, "this is not merely the sound of a flute, but deadly venom, and fills the heart with poison"—the poison of a divine unrest and disillusionment. He is the Pied Piper of the soul, and the children of men who hear his piping follow him through the forests and far away to perfect freedom.

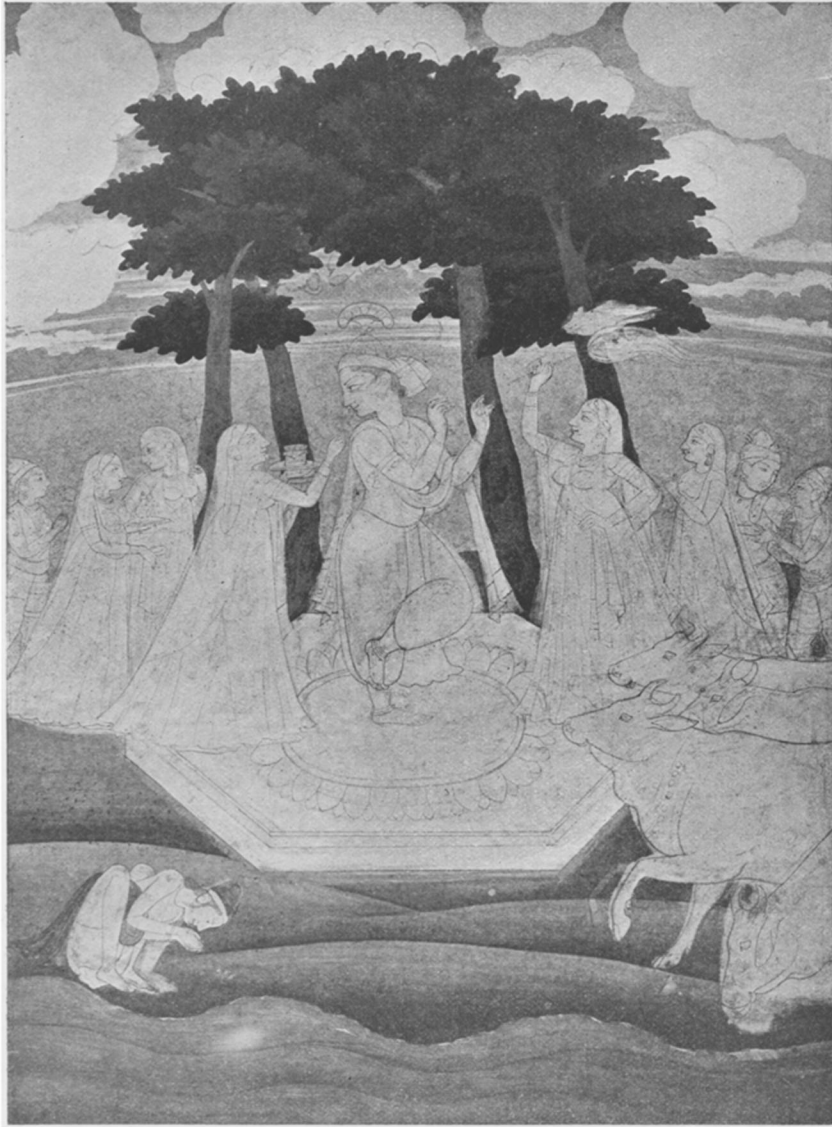
In the Ras Lila the milkmaids leave their homes at night to take part with Krishna in a General Dance on moonlit lawns beside the Jamna; and when he receives them, it is not because they have lived as respectable members of a well-ordered society, but because they have sacrificed their honor in the world, "as a monk abandons his home" (p. 38).

Krishna lies in wait for the milkmaids to exact a toll or forfeit from them as they go down to the ferry on their way to market or to fetch water from the river; and he demands of them not merely gifts of buttermilk and curd, but all that is theirs to give. He has innumerable devices to bring about the difficult meetings with his beloved in a strictly ordered society where women are secluded. In one of the most important of the early Kangra pictures he is disguised as a milkmaid (p. 36). Sometimes he steals the milkmaids' clothes when they are bathing in the river. He is called the Great Deceiver, the Thief of Hearts, and a Rake; and all these are terms at once of reproach and endearment. Amongst the milkmaids, however, there is one who more than all others is Krishna's very self. This is Radha, the daughter of Vrishabanu, and it is her beauty and her love, her joy and her despair that form the theme of a thousand pictures and songs (p. 37).

But Radha and Krishna are not historical characters, nor is Brindaban the village on the map—

* A ritual, mythology, and symbolism ranging from the loftiest poetical and metaphysical concepts to the most elemental orgiastic rites.

† The world process as a whole, or the "wonderful works of the Lord" manifested through any avatar, are commonly spoken of as *Lila*, the sport or play of the Lord. This fundamental concept of Indian theology must not be understood in any trivial way, but in the sense in which the psychologist speaks of the highest activities of genius as more akin to play than work; that is to say, these activities proceed spontaneously out of abundance, and are not undertaken because of any necessity other than that of expression. In a literary sense the word *Lila* has the secondary significance of "cycle," as in the *Krishna Lila*, *Ras Lila*, etc.

*Krishna with the Flute*

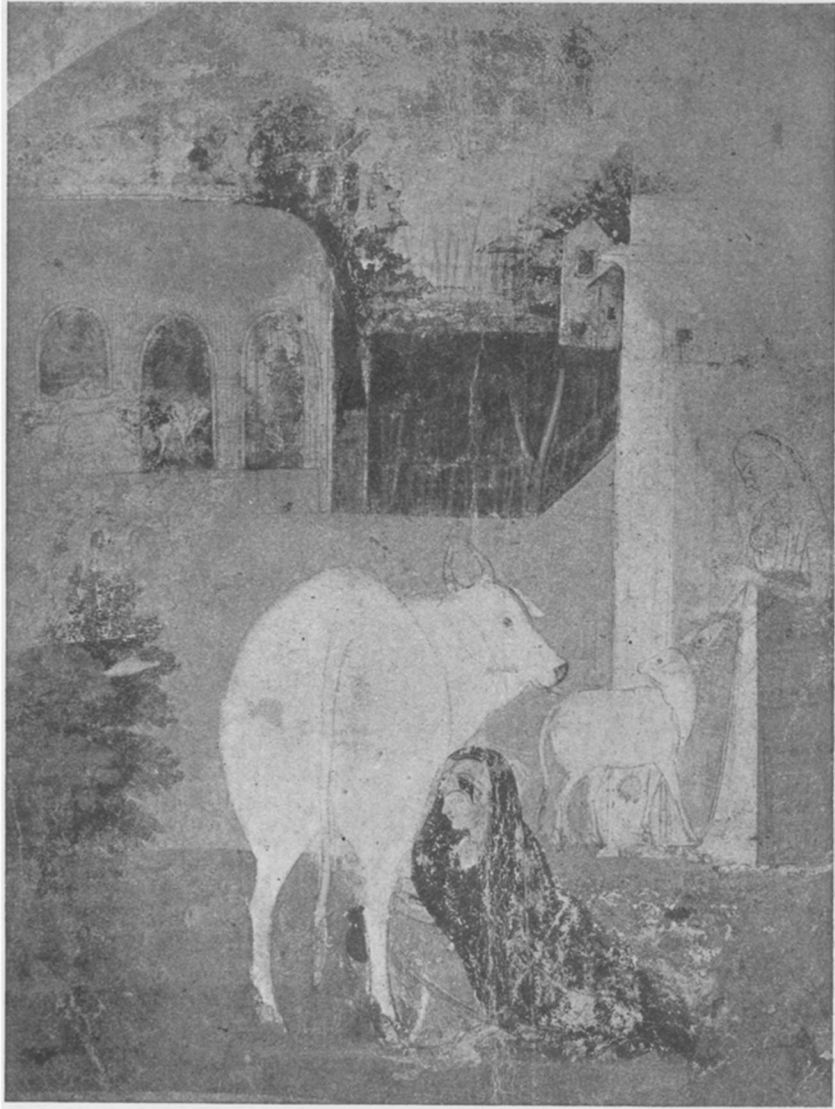
Ross-Coomaraswamy Collection

Kangra, late eighteenth century

the soul of man is the seat of this *Lila*; and to Indian hearts this is a divine mystery. Brindaban is the field of human experience, the milkmaids are the souls of men, and Krishna the divine seducer who betrays them from the bondage of the world and makes them his. Every episode and phase of human love, every delight and each device of lover and beloved is part of a spiritual drama reflecting the life of the soul, and — to use the language of Vaishnava writers — “the interplay of hero and heroine reveal an esoteric meaning.” And this was not an artificial symbolism, as it would appear to modern students, but a patent and self-evident thing, not needing any demonstration. If we should define the method of Hindi poetry and Rajput painting, dealing with the Krishna cycle in

terms of modern rhetoric, it will be as *imagisme* rather than as *allegory*: *imagisme* being the name of a technique in which the sign and the significance are one, and *allegory* of a technique making use of arbitrary figures. What is *allegory* to a foreigner is *imagisme* to a native; in other words, the indigenous art is classic in its own environment, but romantic to the stranger so long as he remains a stranger. He does not understand it until he understands its necessity, and even its obviousness.

The artist is always free to take the world as it is without falsification or sentimentalizing. It depends upon our vision, and not upon things or acts in themselves, what is sacred or profane; and the Vaishnava poets, like all other mystics, were well aware that when the doors of perception are

*Krishna as Milkmaid*

Ross-Coomaraswamy Collection

Early Kangra

cleansed all things are seen as they are, unclouded and infinite. If the world appears imperfect, to us it is the fault of our own vision, which is less clear and more personal than His who rested from his labors and saw that it was good. That which seems to us human is really divine: as Whitman says, too, "Objects gross and the unseen world are one," and the realm of mortality is also the field of release. In this sense the *Prema Sagara* points out "with what and what many and what different dispositions Sri Krishna was revered and salvation obtained; thus Nand, Yasoda and others knew him as a son, the milkmaids as a lover, the herdsmen as a friend, the Pandavas as an ally, Sisupala respected him as a foe, the yogis and sages meditated upon him as very God; but at last every one of these attained emancipation."

The Vaishnava movement and Vaishnava art are thus essentially humanistic and true to the earth — lyrical and mystic (expressing a sense of the infinite significance of familiar experiences) rather than dogmatic or canonical. To find a parallel for all this in European art we should have to follow the development of Christian art from its ages of highest achievement in canonical forms to its free expression in the art of Blake and Calvert, and later in the great post-impressionists. But the position of Blake is very isolated, and "the religion of modern Europe," though it may be traced in Cézanne and Van Gogh, has not yet, like the Zen Buddhism of the Far East or the Vaishnava culture of Hindustan, so far penetrated the common consciousness as to find any adequate expression in popular art.



Radha and Krishna

Kangra, eighteenth to nineteenth century

Ross-Coomaraswamy Collection

Only in the *Gita Govinda*, three pictures for which are in the Museum collections, forming part of a series, there is a rather more deliberate allegory. Here Krishna is the spirit entangled in sensuous experiences; and only when recalled by the messenger, who plays so large a part in the Hindi poems, does he return to his true companion, Radha, and realize the joy of union (p. 39).

SAIVA THEMES

Saiva subjects, wherein "the Great God" (Mahadeva) is represented as a yogi wandering in the Himalayas with his wife, Parvati,—sometimes with their children, Ganesa and Karttikaya,—are often met with in the Kangra School. In a painting attributed to Mola Ram the wanderers have made their camp for the night: Parvati is resting with her head on Siva's knee and the

landscape is one of wooded hills and lotus lakes bathed in summer moonlight (p. 40). This is a work of infinite charm; but the charm is conscious and intentional and shows a certain secularization of the mythological theme. There are other Saiva and Sakta subjects far more austere.

A larger picture shows Siva and Parvati enthroned in a golden pavilion above the summits of the Himalayas, while among the mountains below innumerable *yogis* and *vairagis*—ascetic Saiva devotees—are making their way towards the goal (p. 41).

This picture is inscribed with a Sanskrit verse:

"To the divine Overlord, seated upon the summit of Kailasa, within a shrine as bright as a hundred suns, upon a gem-set throne, intent on meditation, resort of the Siddha host, upon a day,

*Ras Lila, Chorus**Kangra, late eighteenth century*

Ross-Coomaraswamy Collection

"Parvati Devi, daughter of the Mountain (Himavat), humble in devotion, seated upon his left thigh, spake this sentence, root of bliss, for the good of all: 'Hail to Siva!'"

Kailasa, as Dinesh Chandra Sen remarks, "is the abode of bliss, where gold and lead have the same value, where the tiger and the lamb, the mongoose and the serpent are friends, and drink from the same fountain, forgetting their natural enmity. The love, harmony, and tranquillity which pervade Mount Kailasa are all inspired by Mahadeva himself, whose holy dwelling place is thus strangely unlike the heavens of other gods, glittering with gold and making the impression of the aggrandized capital of some worldly monarch."*

The likeness of Siva's home is to be seen in the Himalayan hermitage, as described, for instance, in the *Sakuntala* of Kalidasa, and represented in many Pahari Rajput paintings. The conception of Siva as the Great Yogi is perhaps derived from Buddhism. He represents the permanent principle of the spiritual world: the station of Being, where joy is innocent and pain is peace. He is essentially inert, and his thought is turned backward upon the Absolute rather than outward upon the world. In activity, on the other hand, as the Lord of Dancers, it is no other than Siva who is described in Skryabin's "Poem of Ecstasy"; † and around him

is the grandeur of the entire cosmic environment which his Energy informs.

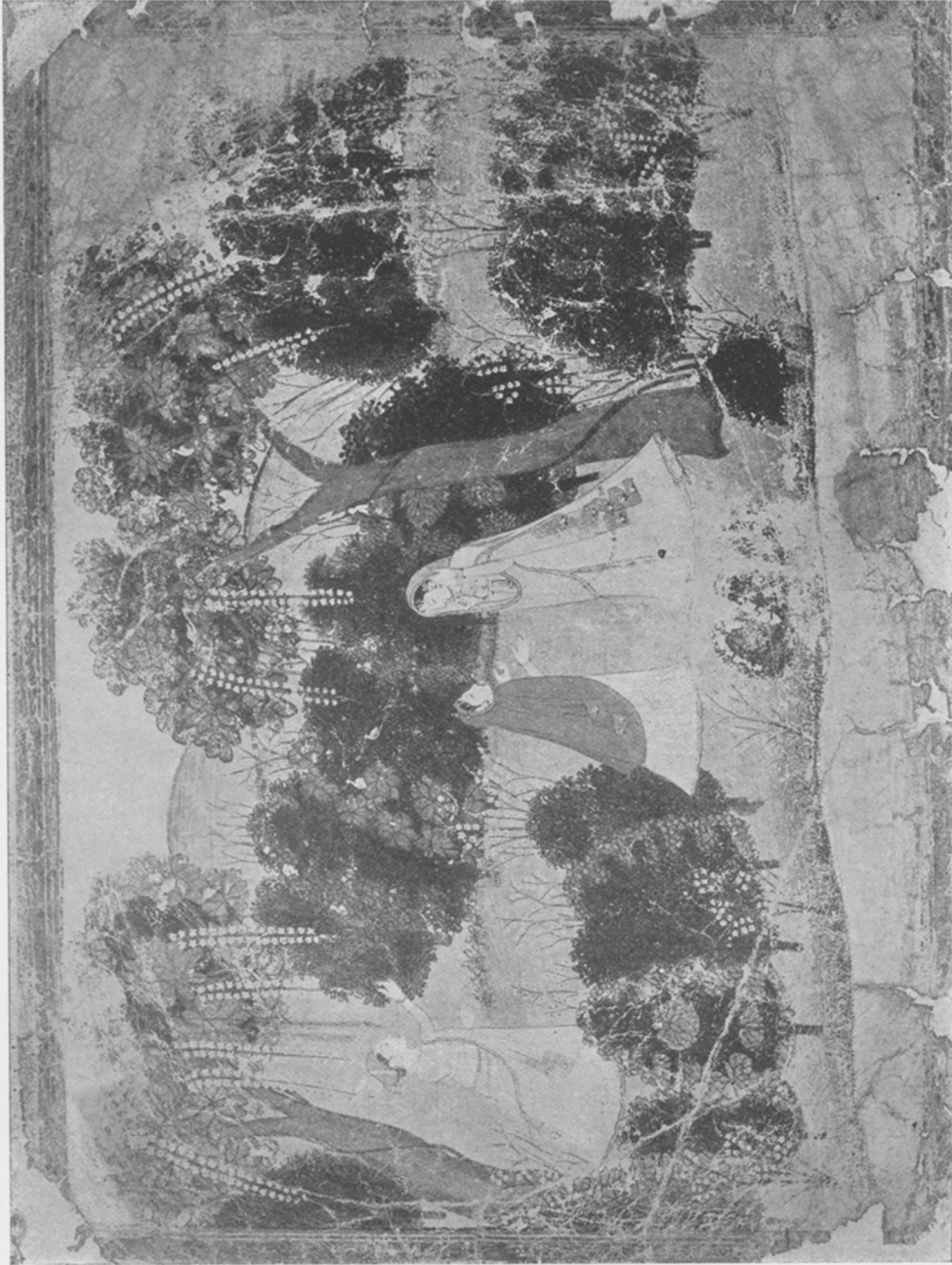
The general name for this Energy is Sakti; and in fact Siva is always associated with his Sakti,—Devi, Uma, Parvati, Durga, or Kali, as she is variously called,—who at one and the same time veils and manifests his reality according to the beholder's power of vision. She is the Absolute in motion, ever active, creating the great illusion of the universe, the world of life and death; and so she is both tenderly and terribly conceived, precisely as we speak of Nature,—and as Prakriti, this is another of Devi's names,—as sometimes smiling, sometimes ruthless.

But this is not merely a metaphysical conception. In popular literature and art it is at the same time a domestic idyl, the theme of innumerable folk songs and of naive pictures drawn by village painters. As Parvati or Uma, Sakti is the daughter of King Himavat, married as a mere child to Siva, who is at once a wandering beggar and the lord of the whole universe—so poor that he cannot buy her even a pair of shell bracelets, and at the same time infinitely rich because there is nothing that he needs. There are times when he forgets even his wife; but she is never unmindful of him. She exhibits every grace and perfection of an Indian "household goddess."

But Sakti herself is also worshipped as the Supreme Being—the Absolute personified as feminine. If it be true that the gods are shaped by man in his own image, such an exaltation of the feminine principle must be very significant to the

*Sen, D. C. *History of Bengali Language and Literature*, 1911, p. 73.

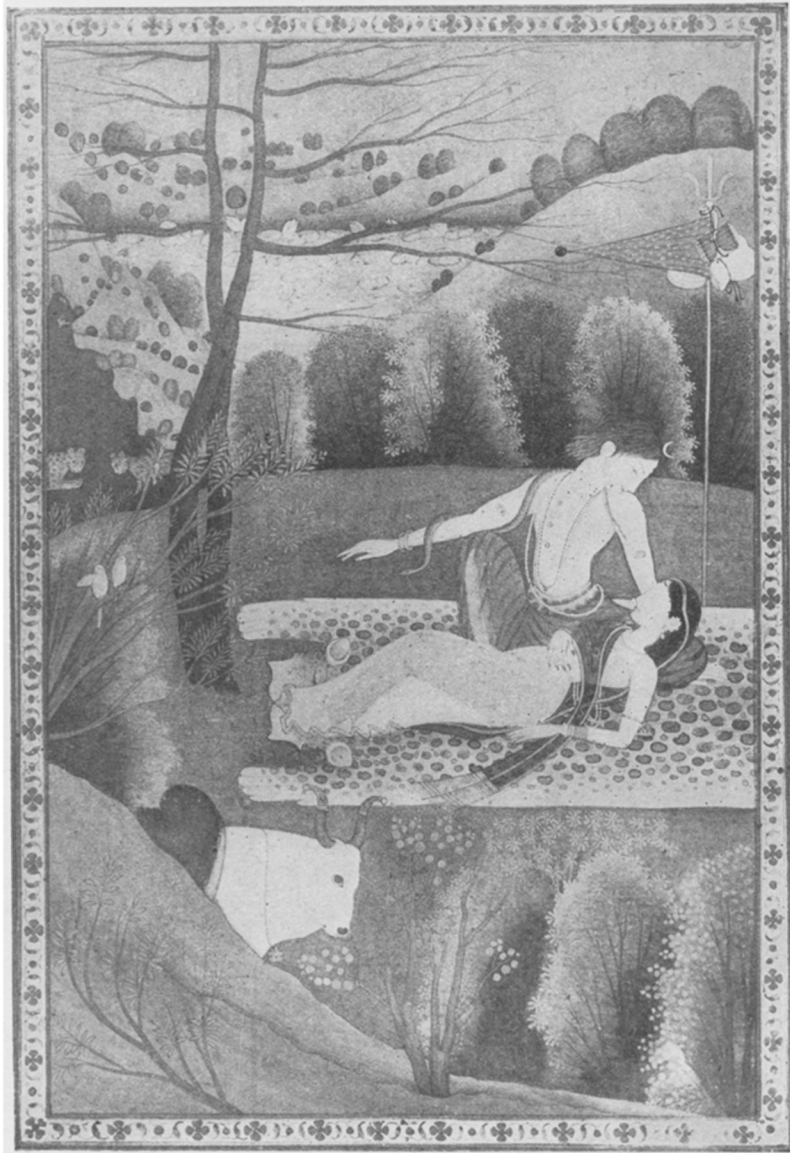
†See the translation by L. L. P. Noble in the Boston Symphony Orchestra Program, October 29, 1917.



Early Kangra

Ross-Coomaraswamy Collection

Gita Govinda : Return of Krishna

*Siva and Parvati**Attributed to Mola Ram of Garhwal*

Ross-Coomaraswamy Collection

student of sociology. The worshippers of Sakti in this sense are called Saktas. It is the goddess who slays the demon Mahisha and fights all the battles of the gods against the demons. A great part of the cult belongs to the group of ideas called Tantrik. In any case the cult is typically emotional and answers to human needs that are scarcely recognized in the austere conception of the abstract and almost impersonal Siva. Illustrations of Tantrik mythology are far from rare amongst the Kangra paintings.

RHETORIC

One of the most characteristic themes of Kangra art is a set of illustrations representing heroines in the stock situations of the Indian literature on rhetoric.

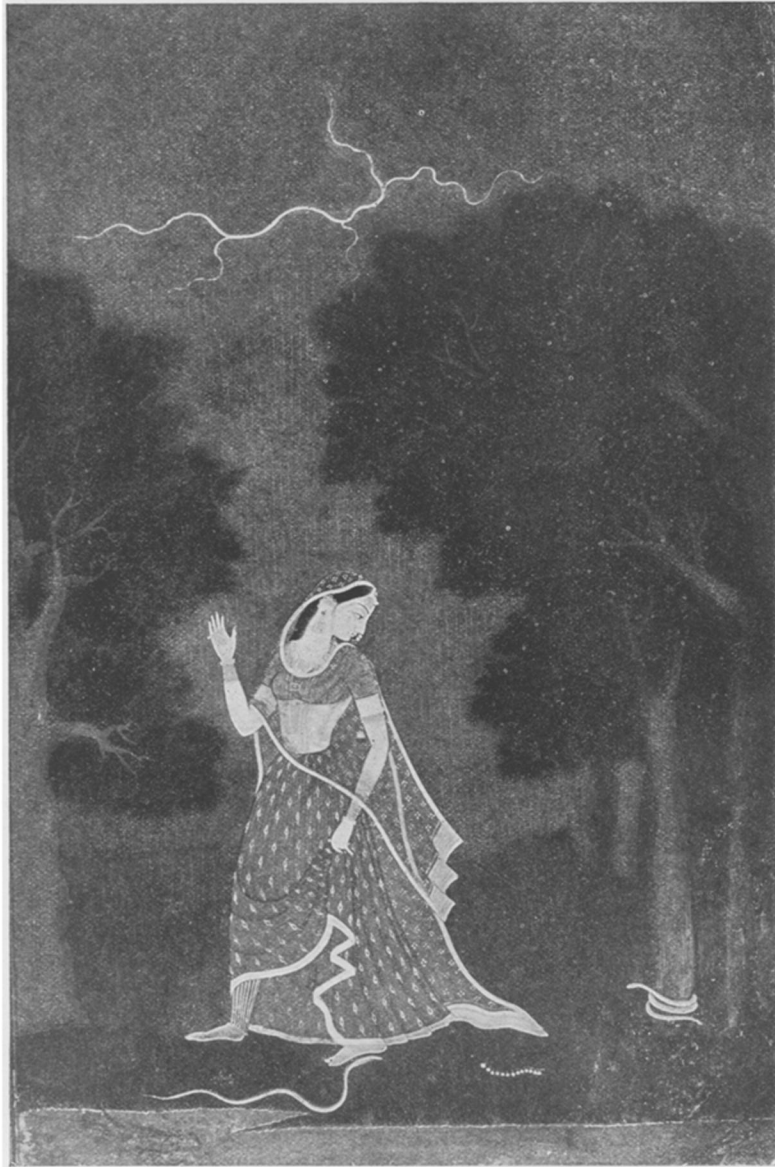
Here the treatment, but almost of necessity, is picturesque and romantic. The *Abhisarika*, for instance, is she who braves the terrors of the black night and drenching storm, her trackless path lit only by flashes of lightning as she goes to visit her lover; but she knows no fear "since Love is at her side" (p. 42). These pictures preserve and repeat the familiar figures of classic Sanskrit literature—we see the foam wreath at the water's edge, "the lightning mated with the clouds," the pouring rain—"until with silver cords it seems that earth is linked with sky"—and notwithstanding these are hackneyed phrases, they are still convincing. As an example of the literature on rhetoric illustrated in such a work as this we may cite the following



Siva with Parvati on Mt. Kailas

Ross-Coomaraswamy Collection

Kangra, late eighteenth century

*Abhisarika Nayaḱa**Attributed to Mola Ram of Garhwal*

Ross-Coomaraswamy Collection

from Kesava Das, a late sixteenth century Hindi poet, whose text is often quoted in inscriptions associated with Rajput paintings :

"Description of the Kamabhisarika . . .

*"Serpents twine about her ankles, snakes
are trampled under foot, divers ghosts
she sees on every hand,
She takes no keep for pelting rain, nor
hosts of locusts screaming 'mid the
roaring of the storm,
She does not heed her jewels falling,
nor her torn dress, the thorns that
pierce her breast delay her not . . .*

The goblin-wives are asking her :
'Whence have you learnt this
Yoga ? how marvellous this trysting,
Abhisarika !' "

ROMANCE

Illustrations for the *Mahabharata* are comparatively rare, and scarcely represented in the Museum collection, apart from an important series illustrating the story of Nala and Damayanti, a romance included in the epic. In one of these we see the old heroic custom of the *Svayamvara* or "own bestowal" of the bride. She is borne in a palanquin about a court where all the suitors are



Nala and Damayanti (detail from "Watching the Full Moon Rise")

Kangra, late eighteenth century

Ross-Coomaraswamy Collection

assembled, and about the neck of the chosen she will place a garland of flowers in token of acceptance. But she — Damayanti — is faced with the problem of distinguishing her mortal lover, Nala, from four of the gods who have assumed an identical form. She accomplishes, however, what is called "an act of truth," and the gods assume their own forms, and congratulating Nala, take their departure to their own places. Following pictures show us marriage processions and ceremonies, then the idyllic life of royal lovers at an Himalayan court; a panorama is unfolded of

morning prayer, the entertainment of Brahmans, meals,—partaken of by each alone in his or her own apartment,—athletic exercises, the receipt of tribute, and all the *vie intime* of Hindu India. The last of the series represents the palace roof at night—the roof is the sleeping porch of India—with the young lovers seated hand in hand upon their couch, ecstatically watching the full moon rise. The whole suggestion is of space and peace, of leisure and affection. Unfortunately these delicate brush drawings do not lend themselves to reduction within the limits of the present page. A. K. C.

The Children's Art Centre, No. 36 Rutland Street

THE Art Centre has issued its first annual report, devoted to the year from May 1, 1918, to May 1, 1919. The report takes the form of a table of statistics and lists, addressed by Miss Edythe Andrews, Curator, to Mr. FitzRoy Carrington, Director of the Art Centre and Curator of Prints at this Museum. Although words descriptive of the work of the Art Centre are lacking in the report, its titles and numbers are easy of interpretation as the record of a year of active work new in this community, but well worth doing. Sculptures in marble, bronze, terra cotta and plaster are represented in the modest lists of acquisitions and loans, as well as porcelain and other minor arts, water-color painting, drawing in charcoal and etchings. The purchases are all reproductions, including examples of the Medici prints, the Vermeer prints, Japanese color prints and plaster casts. The gifts include "Dawn," a marble by Chester Beach, bronzes by Paul Manship and F. G. R. Roth, porcelains by Roth, and terra-cotta groups by

Charles Haag. A gift whose source gives it a special claim is the jute rug woven and given by boys of the Detroit Cripple School. The loans testify to the interest felt in the new enterprise among a wide circle of friends. In all the lists the prominence given to art in other senses than in the usual narrow sense of graphic art is a commendable feature. The children are learning to enjoy good modelling, good pottery and good embroidery, as well as charming and entertaining pictures.

Several friends have aided in installing the exhibits by gifts of frames and cases. The attendance for the year was over eight thousand. The weekly average of the drawing classes was twenty-two, and story-telling on a number of occasions brought out audiences averaging forty children. The collection of a library has begun, and the young frequenters of the Art Centre have already at their command, among more mature books, a large number of the fairy tales illustrated by Randolph Caldecott and Walter Crane.